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Intelligence Units in Congress At Odds on Covert Latin Aid

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

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WASHINGTON, May 17 — The House and Senate intelligence committees are in sharp conflict over Congress's role in curbing covert aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, members of both committees indicated today.

The House Select Committee on Intelligence has approved cutting off all covert aid to Nicaragua, while the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has approved a \$19 million increase in such aid, but asserted its right to approve specific covert operations beginning Oct. 1.

Representative Edward P. Boland, chairman of the House committee, strongly opposes the Senate committee's plan as an inappropriate intrusion of Congress into the President's prerogatives.

"I am concerned about a one-House committee veto," the Massachusetts Democrat said in an interview.

Role of Executive Branch

Specifically, Mr. Boland and others on the House committee have told Senate Democrats that it was the executive branch's role to initiate and conduct covert operations. They do not want Congress to be the President's partner in such actions.

"Some feared that Congress could be in recess when an emergency arose, and therefore be blamed for a delayed or inadequate response to an international crisis.

A House intelligence committee report, made public on Monday, accused the Administration of misleading and ignoring Congress about covert operations in Nicaragua. Some House members fear that if the Administration continues such a practice Congress will nonetheless be held fully accountable for the covert operations.

"The C.I.A. lies to us anyway," said a Democrat on the House committee.

'Legislators, Not Administrators'

Some House Republicans also questioned the wisdom of the Senate plan. "Politically, I don't know how smart their posture is," said Representative Henry J. Hyde, Republican of Illinois, who has played a leading role in the House Foreign Affairs Committee debate on the intelligence committee bill. "It makes them partners in the success or failure of the operation. They should be legislators, not administrators." The

Foreign Affairs Committee has concurrent jurisdiction over the intelligence committee plan.

Senate intelligence committee members, on the other hand, are critical of the House committee's proposed ban on all covert aid for Nicaraguan rebels. They consider the House committee action precipitous.

Senate committee members point out that the House committee approved its plan by a party-line vote of 9 to 5, and believe that the committee hurt itself by failing to gain a consensus that included Republicans.

"They'd like to get themselves out of the predicament they found themselves in," said Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, chairman of the Senate intelligence committee. "I think that party-line vote pretty near destroyed the effectiveness of the House committee."

\$50 Million in Contingency Funds

Some House committee Democrats wanted to reduce drastically, if not eliminate, all contingency money for covert operations, which total \$50 million, and can be used by the Administration without Congress's approval. The proposal lacked support, however, and was abandoned before being put to a vote.

The Senate intelligence committee, whose plan was approved with bipartisan support, believes that its oversight role demands more than simply being informed of covert activities, as is required under present law.

The committee has asked the Administration to present a new plan with its objectives and strategies by Sept. 30, and Mr. Goldwater noted that the Administration had changed both objectives and strategies since the covert aid began in 1981.

Some Senate committee members contend that committee approval of specific covert operations is necessary because such operations necessarily violate existing treaties with nations in which the operations occur. Those treaties, they note, are the law of the land.

"It's a question of how you exercise oversight," said Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, a committee member.

House Republicans Are Split

Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee were divided, meanwhile, over the prospects of bipartisan action on the House intelligence committee bill. The Foreign Affairs Committee is expected to vote on the measure Wednesday.

Mr. Hyde, a conservative Republican, doubted the possibility of a bipartisan compromise. "They haven't left us any room," he said. "It has become a partisan issue."

But Representative Jim Leach, a moderate Republican of Iowa and a former Foreign Service officer who often votes with the committee's Democrats, said, "My guess is that if only the Democrats' measure can come out, Republicans will be forced to vote for it."

Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs committee decided tonight to bar the public from the debate Wednesday on the ground that floor consideration of the measure would also be closed.